

→ Towards 21st Century European Libraries and Museums by Luca Basso Peressut, MeLa Project Coordinator → Open call for proposals by MACBA → MeLa research reports → MeLa Related: one book, one project, events and call for papers



→ EDITORIAL

MeLa is an interdisciplinary programme which reflects on the role of museums and libraries dealing with several crucial issues such as history, socio-cultural and national identity, the use of technologies, exhibition design and museography. By the use of innovative research methods – such as “Think Tank” modules and “Research by Art” – and traditional ones – such as Desk Research and International Conferences – MeLa final objective is to develop some Guidelines tested by a Design Application and intended to support the museum and library communities, practitioners and policymakers in developing the mission and forms of museums and libraries in the “age of migrations”. The MeLa Newsletter will provide an update every four months about the Project, its outcomes, events and publications and will briefly introduce the nine Project Partners. Finally each issue and a monthly bulletin will present other relevant activities and events related to MeLa research topics which are going on in the wider European research community such as call for papers, book presentations, exhibition reviews or other research project descriptions. The MeLa Staff is pleased to launch this first issue of the MeLa Newsletter.

Towards 21st Century European Libraries and Museums

Museums and libraries, as institutions for the conservation and transmission of cultural values, seem today to find themselves in the middle of a process involving the construction of a pluralistic civic community that should be capable of expressing the

migration is a complex condition of the contemporary society

variety and dynamics of the ever-changing needs of people, as well as the multiplicity of contemporary transnational culture. The remark on this situation is the main food for thought of the MeLa Project that, proceeding from the European call *Reinterpreting Europe's cultural heritage: towards 21st century libraries and museums*, aims just to reflect on the role of museums and libraries in a context which tends to be more and more characterized by a continuous migration of people and ideas. It is well-known that the matter of migration of peoples and cultures and the consequent

“layerization” of societies and identities are not recent issues triggered by the international economy and the process of globalization: they are in fact widely recognized as fundamental elements to the establishment of modern Europe from its onset five centuries ago until now.

Migration actually is not only a matter related to people, but it is a complex condition of the contemporary society: there are different kinds of “migrations” each of which on its side can have different consequences on the organization and on the forms of museums. We may have migrations of bodies, people and entire populations as well as individuals who may travel to work, study, do research or tourism; migrations of objects, such as works of art, books, collections; migrations of knowledge, ideas and information and finally migrations can also affect culture and cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, involving changes in their conservation and transmission in museums which more and more have to deal with the problems of preserving, enhancing and transmitting very weak expressions of the common heritages such as words, talks or

experiences. As Tony Bennett recently stated, museums now seem self-evidently to be part of globalized flows of information, people and ideas; even though they have been created by national or local governments or by private organizations, they can reach out beyond their own walls and beyond their national boundaries.

“musealization of nearly every phenomenon of humanity” as Victoria Newhouse already envisioned in 1998.

The causes of this situation are several and complex and have been largely discussed. As consequence, museums currently are in the middle of an important process of deep institutional transformations amongst which

counter” places of power turned into places of cultural integration.

However, one question in particular seems not to have already been explored enough both in theoretical studies in the field and in other recent research projects which investigate similar issues. It is the question of how all these remarks, these changes and these new theories have influenced the practice of curatorship, the design and the organization of museums.

Museums and libraries are the physical places and the architectonic spaces for the material conservation of “things”, along with the preservation of memories and cultures and the transmission and communication of knowledge. Beyond the possibilities offered by virtual exhibitions, ICT and new technologies in museums and in temporary exhibitions, the presence of “real things” is an ineludible part of their mission and organization. Here knowledge is materialized in the artefacts and that is a vital component of their identity.

The MeLa Project objectives for the forthcoming four years therefore on one hand are to study and deepen the above mentioned theoretical reflections and on the other hand to evaluate their operational effectiveness and applications to museum and library architecture and organisation.

Excerpt from the speech given by Luca Basso Peressut, MeLa Project Coordinator, during the MeLa launching conference.

how these changes are influencing the design and the organisation of museums and libraries

An interdisciplinary approach and the concept of cultural identity as a multicultural comparison thus might become methods for libraries and museums to define and design new cultural proposals. These proposals should reinterpret the cultural heritage at a scale which is not constrained by national borders and targeted to larger audiences “recognizing museums - as Lynn Swzaja said - as arenas of discourse and negotiation useful in defining new forms of public culture.” Museums in particular have always had a special role in establishing the values of the public sphere. However, as seems to happen to the majority of the expressions of the contemporary society, museums today have no longer to represent a unitary and monolithic reality. Today’s museums system is articulated and multifaceted inasmuch as it seems possible today to talk about a

the changing of the role of the museum itself from privileged place for conserving and exposing “things” to powerful medium of social communication. At the same time, the idea of museum as a “collective place” has been increasingly consolidated, and its mission has shifted from moral lessons to entertainment and mass uses. An afterthought of the role of museums and libraries as cultural institutions and repositories of the memory and the identity of the past history should therefore focus also on the altered, widened and diversified relationship that they establish with the different visitors each of which has its own identity and interests, aesthetic dimension and cognitive dimension in interpreting museum exhibitions.

Museums and libraries, in a manner which could be somehow utopian, are being reconsidered as “contact zones”, “spaces of en-

→ MELA RELATED: ONE PROJECT

Last April the Conference “Exhibiting Europe: The Development of European narratives in museums, collections, and exhibitions” held in Oslo at the Intercultural Museum, closed the Research Project *Exhibiting Europe*.

It was a research programme funded by the Research Council of Norway hosted by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in collaboration with the Institute for European Ethnology at Humboldt University and the Centre for European and International Studies Research at the University of Portsmouth. The project analyzed the development of a European narrative and heritage in museums, collections and exhibitions and dealt with the issue of musealization of Europe. Its final conference brought together disciplines of Social Anthropology, Cultural and Museum Studies and Contemporary History to analyze the topics of integration and “Europeanization” and their relation with museums and exhibitions. The research staff is now working on the publication of project results that will be collected in a book in German edited by Böhlau next spring.

www.ntnu.edu/ifs/research/exhibiting

A becoming-migrant of the museum?

Within the field of “Museum Studies” the role played by concepts such as ‘fluidity’, ‘co-operation’, ‘relationality’ is continually increasing. They are employed to shift the critical focus from the ‘modernist’ conception of museums to a dynamic and reticular dimension much more in tune with the contemporary world. To map this peculiar assemblage, in which the traditional idea of the museums comes to be ‘exploded’, it is useful to appeal to concepts such as “affective economy” and “the immaterial turn”,

resituate these transformations on the enlarged map of a postcolonial world

which seek to ‘catch’ the broad dimension of ‘social productivity’ at work in the production of ‘styles’, ‘ways of life’, ‘tastes’. However, what is often underrated is the possibility of tracing a zone of coincidence between the attention to desire and cooperation, to networking and openness found in

these approaches, and some of the tools and practices found in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies and in the direct and lived experience of ‘being in transit’ that characterizes ‘being migrants’. My perspective proposes a possible example of a future ‘postcolonial museum’ in the rhythms of the dance music of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in some European cities. I will try to show how the sounds of the urban spaces of the postcolonial world – the sounds of the contact zones of migration – operate in ways whose ‘propagative transmission’ can be used as a key to understand ways in which museums are addressed in critical theory and conceived in artistic practices. This entails an attempt to dislocate these ‘transformations’ from the privileged ‘home’ where they are usually worked out – i.e. ‘academia’ and ‘the world of curators’ – and to resituate them on the enlarged ‘map’ of a postcolonial world transversed and worked through by fluxes of desire and fluxes of migrations, by fluxes of people and by the rhythms of a ‘diffused’ intellectuality.

Beatrice Ferrara, PhD in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World (UNO)



→ MELA RELATED: ONE BOOK

Whitehead, Christopher. 2011. *Interpreting Art in Museums and Galleries*. London: Routledge.

In this book the author provides an overview and critique of art interpretation practices in museums and galleries. Covering the philosophy and sociology of art, traditions in art history and art display, the psychology of the aesthetic experience and ideas about learning and communication, Whitehead advances major theoretical frameworks for understanding interpretation from curators' and visitors' perspectives.

Although not a manual, the book is deeply practical. It presents extensively researched European and North American case studies involving interviews with professionals engaged in significant cutting-edge interpretation projects.

Finally, it sets out the ethical and political responsibilities of institutions and professionals engaged in art interpretation.

The book, edited by Routledge will come out in December.

Open call for proposals. Redefinition of the lobby of MACBA study centre.

MACBA launched an Open Call for proposals for the lobby of its Study Centre; the Call takes place within the context of *Envisioning Museums & Libraries for the Post-National Society* (WP07) and constitutes one of the preliminary contributions to the forthcoming *Experimental Design Application* (WP08).

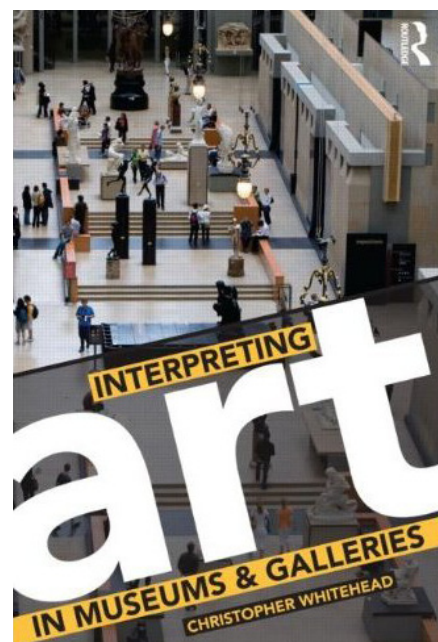
the call aims to gather proposals able to approach the project for the new space pattern for the lobby from new perspectives

The Call aims to gather ideas for the drafting of a new space for the Study Centre lobby, a "friction zone" which shares features with museum exhibition areas, library reading rooms and event spaces and whose role is

currently in the process of being redefined. The objective is to collect proposals which are able to approach the project from new perspectives in giving physical shape to this. This is not an Open Call for theoretical proposals: the selection committee will select and then disseminate those proposals that include the most relevant and creative solutions that can be carried out in practical, effective ways. Uses and requirements drafted in the Call.

The Call is open to academic institutions from the fields of Architecture, Interior Design, Curatorial Studies, etc., which wishes to take part in the organization of a seminar or academic project related to the Call. Postgraduate students from any of these or related fields are welcome to submit individual or group proposals and an experts committee will select the most salient ones. The deadline is January 25, 2012.

More information are available on the MeLa website www.mela-project.eu.



Cover of the forthcoming book "Interpreting Art in Museums and Galleries" by C. Whitehead

→ MELA PARTNERS: THE MUSÉE DE L'HOMME

The MeLa Consortium is made up by 9 European Partners and one of its peculiarities is indeed its very interdisciplinary composition since it has been based mainly on a thematic structure aimed at achieving a large interdisciplinary network of excellence. It is also characterized by the participation of 2 Museums on international level in order to not only foster academic research but also "field" experience: this issue presents the Musée de l'Homme.

The Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, founded in 1793, is a government institution with the mission of developing research, collections, expertise and education in the fields of natural history and human sciences. It owns several scientific galleries, including the Musée de l'Homme, zoological and botanical gardens all over France and its collections are among the most important in the world in the

field of natural sciences and the science of humankind. The Musée de l'Homme was created in 1937 by Paul Rivet for the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*. The department Homme, nature, société is a research department of MNHN. It investigates, with a very complementary approach, relationship of man with the nature over time and space from a biological cultural and social point of view combining disciplines such as biological anthropology, genetics, prehistory, social and cultural anthropology, ethnology, ethnobiology, ethnomusicology, geography, history and philosophy of science and technology. The Department enhances also the dissemination of knowledge through exhibitions, teaching and research training and it is currently actively involved in the renovation of the Musée de l'Homme.



MeLa launching conference

The MeLa Kick off Meeting was organised as a three day working workshop including management meetings, a research meeting and a public international conference aimed at presenting the MeLa Project and its research topics to a large public.

The conference has been held at the Musei Capitolini, the first national museum in the world founded in 1471 while the MeLa's first research meeting has been held at the MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts opened in 2009 which actually is the first Italian national institution devoted to contemporary creativity.

The conference was open to the general public and was devoted in particular to the academic and research community, experts, practitioners and to the Museums and Libraries community. In the morning the MeLa

Partners briefly presented themselves and the Project. In the afternoon keynote speakers and a panel of experts from the field discussed the principal topics of the research.

Peter Aronsson from Linköpings Universitet (S) gave a speech entitled *National Museums negotiating the past for a desired future*, describing the MeLa related research project EUNAMUS; Gordon Fyfe, Honorary Fellow at Keele University (UK) presented the paper *Museums, the sociological imagination and the imaginary museum* and Sreten Ugričić, the Director of National Library of Serbia (SRB) spoke on *Materialization and dematerialization. Migration and emulation. Museum and Library*.

In conclusion, an interesting discussion developed, thanks also to the various stimuli offered by the intervention of the panel ex-

perts Marina Mattei (Archaeological Curator Musei Capitolini, Rome) Giovanni Pinna (Director of the magazine *Nuova Museologia*) Massimo Negri (Director of the European

the proceedings of the conference will be published in autumn in the MeLa book series

Museum Academy) and Romolo Martemucci (President of Accademia Adrianea Architettura e Archeologia).

In autumn the proceedings of the conference will be published in the MeLa Books series, meanwhile several documents have been uploaded on the MeLa website.

→ MELA NETWORK

The National Library of Serbia is one of the oldest cultural institution in Serbia and it represents the national primary informational and cultural wealth. The NLS collections contain over 5 million publications of various types and its catalogues in printed and electronic formats provide an easy access for users over the world without any restrictions. Its missions are preservation, presentation and promotion of the cultural heritage within the Country and abroad.

www.nb.rs

The Sofia Art Gallery today possesses some of the richest collections of Bulgarian art. The Contemporary Art and Photography department was founded in 2004. The Gallery's chief responsibility is to conserve, maintain and study art heritage and the SAG role is to present the facts of Bulgarian cultural history in an analytical and modern way and to actively intervene in art developments by original projects.

<http://sghg.bg>

Take Part in the MeLa Project: a growing and working network

The Project aims to create an ever growing network of museums, libraries, galleries, research centres and research projects to be constantly developed during the whole Project. Being involved in the MeLa Network means to be timely updated about research progresses, to be directly involved in Think Tank modules as counterparts of MeLa members, to be invite to submit essays to our Call for Papers and to take part in the International Conferences as invited speakers.

The Network is made up of three sections: MUSEUMS LIBRARIES AND GALLERIES NETWORK. Members of this network will also offer themselves as location for MeLa events and/or as case studies; their staff could be involved in MeLa meetings, seminars, etc. Institutions interested in the Project can join the Network via our website.

SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY NETWORK. This group includes Universities, research projects

and research groups/centres that deal with MeLa topics. Members of this group could be selected by the MeLa staff and included in this group due to the relation of their research domains with MeLa topics or they could send their application autonomously via our website. Beside the possibilities offered by taking part in the Network, several additional kinds of cooperation can be explored and agreed on.

INDIVIDUAL&INDEPENDENTSCHOLARSNETWORK. This group is composed of selected scholars and artists interested in MeLa topics who are invited by MeLa to contribute to the scientific aspect of the research in several ways (as keynote speakers, members of the panels for the review of books, think tank participants, etc...).

To apply for joining the network please fill the on line form on www.mela-project.eu/network

Pointing to an open access research.

On May 31st the Official MeLa Website was launched.

In less than one month the website had more than 1,000 visits from almost 70 countries; the first data from web statistics are really very rewarding, as well as subscriptions to the newsletter. The website, available at: www.mela-project.eu, not only provides an exhaustive description of the Project mission work plan and Partners, but above all it is meant as a platform for the exchange of ideas and dialog within the framework of the research domains.

Since the widespread use of the advancement of knowledge produced is promoted in MeLa, the concept of dissemination in the Project is indissolubly linked to availability and accessibility of research findings and outcomes. Therefore, an open access policy has

been agreed on by the Consortium partners, and an extensive set of open source dissemination tools and activities has been planned.

The website has an important role in guarantying access to all Project products, both publications such as books or papers and official documents such as deliverables. It presents them as readable and downloadable, free of charge whenever possible, and in any case, at least in their executive summary.

Moreover, the website is constantly updated with MeLa news, forthcoming conferences and calls for papers organized inside the Project or related to our research topics. Finally, the MeLa Blog is an open tool for discussions, proposal submissions, reports, ideas and suggestions in a more informal and open context.

→ MELA ONGOING

The MeLa Project currently is in the first phase of its research activity, which is devoted to a survey on the state-of-the art in the project domains. The Consortium's efforts are now focused on having a clear and exhaustive pattern of the research in the field, gathering stimuli and indications also from other research actions and enhancing synergic influences in order to improve the exchange of ideas amongst the wider European research community.

Within six months we will start organizing the Think Tank modules and then different International Conferences scheduled in our work plan.

This column will promptly inform in each MeLa news issue about all the forthcoming consortium goals and events

→ NEXT MELA RELATED EVENTS

July 2011

Conference:

Identity and heritage
Berlin, Germany

Conference:

Re-Visiting the Contact Zone: Museums, Theory, Practice
Linköping, Sweden
MeLa | Luca Basso Peressut invited keynote speaker

Conference:

Exhibited Knowledge
Bielefeld, Germany

August 2011

Conference:

The effect of new technologies on library design: building the 21st century library
Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Conference:

Libraries beyond libraries: Integration, Innovation and Information for all
Puerto Rico, USA

September 2011

Conference:

Knowledge / Culture / Social Change
Sydney, Australia

Conference:

Cultural Heritage / Cultural Identity The Role of Conservation
Lisbon, Portugal

Conference:

Places, people, stories 2011
Kalmar, Sweden
MeLa | Paper by G. Postiglione and M. Bassanelli

Call for papers

Symposium:

Whose Participation? Spaces of Interaction in Contemporary Art and Architecture
Zurich, Switzerland

DEADLINE: 1st August 2011

Conference:

Diverse Spaces: Examining identity, community and citizenship within Canadian public culture
Peterborough, Canada

DEADLINE: 31 August 2011

Conference:

Opening the Boundaries of Citizenship
Milton Keynes, UK

DEADLINE: 12 September 2011

Find out more details about
MeLa Related Events into the MeLa web
site
www.mela-project.eu

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Francesca Lanz and Elenora Lupo
GRAPHIC DESIGN: Zetalab.com



PROJECT DURATION: March 1, 2011 – February 28, 2015
COORDINATOR: Professor Luca Basso Peressut
COORDINATING ORGANISATION: Politecnico di Milano IT
PROJECT NO: EU FP Grant Agreement No 266757
RESEARCH AREA: SSH-2010-5-2-2
CONTRACT TYPE: collaborative project

LEGAL NOTICE: The views expressed here are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

